Contextualizing Risk and Resiliency:
Using Narrative Inquiry with Female Adolescents in an Alternative High School Program

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ABSTRACT

This narrative inquiry explores the lives of five ninth grade female adolescents enrolled in an alternative school for students who have been expelled from an urban school district. The population of female students in the school increased from 21 to 102 over five years. The same trend is evident nationally. This study uses theories that label resiliency as hope, recognizes its dynamic nature and the contexts in which risk and resiliency develop to explore the complexities of these concepts among the participants, and suggests a model focusing on prevention in the pre-adolescent years. Audio-tape recorded interviews were transcribed and analyzed using broadening, burrowing, and re-storying to discuss perceptions of risk and resiliency, and parallel stories to analyze those aspects of the participants' stories pertaining to school structure. The metaphor of "Making Mosaics" reveals how high-risk female adolescents contextualize negative experiences and develop resiliency despite predictions of failure. These findings further gender-specific programming efforts by advancing the voices of individuals who are impacted most.

INTRODUCTION

A segment of female adolescents has become more violent over the past decade (OJJDP, 2000 and 2001). In 2000, law enforcement made an estimated 2.4 million arrests of persons under the age of 18; twenty-eight percent were female (OJJDP Bulletin, 11/02). Eighteen percent of all violent crimes involving juveniles were committed by females. Though juvenile females' involvement with the law is small relative to that of males (OJJDP Annual Report, 2000), this increase in case-rates concerns the justice system and the community at large.

Female juvenile offenders exhibit many of the risk factors common to males, but receive far fewer services (Morley, Rossman, Kopczynski, Buck, & Gouvis, 2000, p. 47). The Women in Criminal Justice report (1998) quoting Shay Bilchik of the OJJDP states, "Our system of prevention and intervention for juveniles has traditionally been geared to the provision of services to males rather than females who have traditionally been ignored both at the practitioner level and at the academic research level" (p. 27). It came to be understood that research that encompassed several fields of study must be developed to address this trend.

This investigation stems from work done (by this principle investigator) with females at an alternative school program "Recovery Place" (a pseudonym for an educational program for students who have been expelled from a mainstream public school district) in a large, urban district in the southwestern United States. During her first two years as the social worker at Recovery Place, this investigator noted a five-fold increase in the numbers of females, growing from 21 in 1996 to 102 in 2003. Building on the work of a pilot case study (Washington, 2002), events leading to the research participants' expulsion and placement at the alternative school are examined within the broader context of family and community. The results of the expanded study led to recommendation of prevention strategies beginning at fourth grade for female students.

Historical Perspectives

From investigations of children of schizophrenic parents who showed unexpected adaptive patterns, to research that included multiple risks such as socioeconomic disadvantage, parental mental illness, community violence, etc. early resiliency research was concerned with understanding individual variations in response to adversity (Luthar, et. al., 2000). The next wave of research included longitudinal investigations examining outcomes associated with exposure to risks. These studies attempted to locate *protective factors* that distinguished those with healthy adaptation from their less healthy counterparts. Later research yielded an understanding that resiliency factors outside the individual (i.e. aspects of their families and their social context) could also impact the potential for resiliency. However, while these

combined lines of study proved useful in identifying positive attributes in individuals and the environment, they did not provide an understanding as to how these factors worked.

As researchers, we now understand resiliency as a *multifaceted dynamic process* that occurs in a non-linear fashion and allows some individuals to demonstrate a positive response to risks (Doll & Lyon, 1998; Luthar et al., 2000). However, despite evidence supporting this developmental perspective (Doll & Lyon, 1998; Pianta & Walsh, 1998), once an individual has been exposed to a collection of risks (or even a single risk), then receiving a determination of "resiliency" is still predicated on long-range, fixed outcome measures such as: academic success, family stability, non-involvement with the law, and so on. Under the existing theories, individuals who have been expelled from school would not be candidates for the "resiliency" label.

"High-risk" Groups

Recent research on educational resiliency appears to address this issue by exploring "high-risk" (those exposed to multiple, cumulative risks) groups. This research focused on more diverse student populations and students who functioned at the "margins of achievement," (Wang, Haertel, & Walberg, 1993). It establishes schools as "learning communities" that support students' resiliency through involving them as "stakeholders" in their learning environments (Freiberg, 1994). Based on, "proactive and additive models rather than on individual or collective deficits," (Freiberg, 1994, p. 151) these investigations create an opportunity for examining personal, familial, and environmental factors of children in these high-risk groups to determine configurations of competence that have not previously been recognized.

Resiliency as a Developmental Process

Rutter's (1990) conceptualization of a risk/resiliency continuum allows for a study of these processes together rather than as static opposing factors lending an understanding of *how* they work in these "high-risk" groups. He contends, "Particular attention needs to be paid to the mechanisms operating *at key turning points* in people's lives, when a risk trajectory may be redirected onto a more adaptive path" (Rutter, 1990, p. 210). Rutter's theory allows researchers not only to consider other variables that impact risk status, but it also suggests that resiliency and risk are linked to an individual's development, transforming as the individual transforms. This idea has significant relevance to the study of resiliency in high-risk female adolescents because much of this groups' individual development is tied to their ever-changing relationships and social development (Peters, 2002).

While it is important to study resiliency as a developmental process, it is equally important to look at the dynamic nature of the concept. Todis, Bullis, Waintrup, Schultz, and D'Ambrosio (2001) conducted a five-year study of formerly incarcerated youth, examining resiliency from a developmental perspective. They conclude future investigations should examine adjustment across time and contexts given that respondents continued to exhibit instability into their early and mid-twenties (p. 138). Similarly, Freitas and Downey (1998) found that "particular characteristics rarely serve exclusively as risk or protective functions, that individuals who seem resilient on one index often do not seem so on other indices, and that individuals are not equally resilient across contexts," (p. 263). This notion of resiliency as a dynamic, contextual entity proves paramount and serves as one basis for the present investigation.

Framing the Study

"Clearly resilience is not a single, unitary concept but involves a number of personal capacities and conditions" (Keogh, 2000, p. 9). However, research has defined this concept based on characteristics of exemplars who have *avoided* negative outcomes. This investigation expands views of what it means to be "resilient" through: 1) a selection process that does not focus solely on "exemplars"; 2) an interview process that solicits participants' perceptions to provide a context for "how" they reached points of risk and possible resiliency; and 3) a narrative inquiry and analysis that allows stories to be situated within the contexts of family, community, and school.

Todis, Bullis, Waintrup, Schultz, and D'Ambrosio (2001) note that qualitative approaches help, "to gain a clear and more in-depth theoretical understanding of both person-based and environmental variables associated with resilience" (p. 119). Using a single case study design and narrative inquiry as a means of gathering data, Washington (2002) explores the relationship between risk and resiliency in a pilot to the current investigation. Based on findings from transcribed interviews and narrative analysis of those findings, her investigation concluded that the concepts of risk and resiliency may function as dualities acting in concert with one another, often in the same context (Washington, 2002). This research further concluded that the participant's perceptions of her contexts mediated the impact of her risks allowing a resilient (hopeful) character to emerge. Narrative inquiry with roots grounded in the humanities and the social sciences (Clandinin & Connelly, 1994; Lieblich & Josselson, 1994; Riessman, 1994; Bell, 2002), is used in this expanded study to test this theory further and to begin to develop research based on constructivist principles that under-girds gender-specific preventative programming for

high-risk female adolescents.

METHODOLOGY

Research Questions

Specifically, by expanding the pilot from a single case to a collective case study, this research attempts to further analyze Washington's (2002) theory of risk and resiliency as dualities and investigate how that theory plays out in practical settings. The current investigation is framed by the following questions:

1. Are the events that placed an individual both at risk for school failure as well as posed a potential risk for involvement with the law mediated by perceptions of academic and social contexts?

2. What role, if any, do perceptions and the narrative accounting of negative life events (risks) and positive coping strategies (resiliency) play in mediating risks and enhancing resilient characteristics of female students in an alternative school setting?

Participants

The collective consists of five (N=5) female ninth grade students (four Hispanic and one African American) enrolled during the 2004-2005 school year in Recovery Place. The participants range in age from 14 to 16 and all were expelled for violation of the school district's drug policy.

Data Gathering

In this study, the researcher and practitioner (i.e. school social worker) are one and the same. Field texts were based on notes from the researcher's experience as the social worker, interviews with the participants and the resulting transcripts, the school handbook, historical and demographic data gathered from students' cumulative school records as well as alternative school orientation packets, and relevant statistics taken from a variety of sources including the school district's website. School disciplinary records were analyzed before the semi-structured interviews.

Data Analysis

Three levels of narrative analysis were employed. Connelly and Clandinin (1990) apply the terms broadening, burrowing, and re-storying. *Broadening* occurs when the researcher recalls an event in order to make a general comment about the teller's character, values, or way of life. Moving from the general aspects, *burrowing* focuses on the narrative's emotional qualities and allows us to ask why the event is associated with these feelings. Finally, *re-storying* follows from this process of reconstructing the event and asks what meaning the narrative holds and how the teller may "create

a new story of self which changes the meaning of the event, its description, and its significance for the larger life story the person may be trying to live" (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p. 11).

The pilot study reveals interplay between the participant and the varying contexts of her life (Washington, 2002). Initial evidence suggests that narrative inquiry as a research methodology may allow researchers and educators to hear the "stories" that shape the context of delinquent female adolescents' lives and allow these individuals to develop resiliency characteristics *in the midst* of their risky circumstances. Parallel stories as a research methodology is instrumental in capturing participants' interpretive knowledge as they move from one context to another (Craig, 1999, p. 371). Additionally, because the concepts of risk and resiliency may function as dualities with individuals experiencing varying degrees of both within the same context, a method, such as parallel stories, is suited to highlighting the impact of "weaving these complex narratives together" (Craig, 1999, p. 376).

Finally, the metaphor of "Making Mosaics" developed in the pilot study (Washington, 2002) facilitates an explanation of these processes. Using the metaphor of "mosaics," Washington (2002) concludes that through the process of re-storying (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990), an individual configures irregular fragments representing risks into a mosaic subject using narrative. The final composition, which is greater than its parts, allows the resilient character of the storyteller to be revealed.

RESULTS

Although this is a collective case study, individual narratives are important. While the totality of those research texts cannot be presented here, these excerpts are representative selections of the themes that emerged across the cases: school stories, family stories, stories of peers, and transformation stories.

Tanya

Tanya's story seems veiled, much like the way she styled her hair (large bangs combed over her youthful round eyes). The story of how she came to be at the alternative school is told with reticence in response to the interviewer's questions.

School stories.

INTERVIEWER: When did you first get here?
RESPONDANT: I don't know. I don't know what month I came...Whew, I don't really remember that day. I remember going to the office and being sent home.

INTERVIEWER: How did you forget about it?
RESPONDENT: Sleeping it off. Don't think about it. Just didn't think about it.
RESPONDENT: [My momma] was like, "I can't wait 'til you get up outta [the alternative school]." She [says] I am changing . . . Ever since I came here. My grades, my attitude; I can tell the difference. Like when the teacher is talking to me. . . and, I don't know, I am sitting there in my class, usually I don't say nothing, but [now I] start out-bursting and just talking loud. . .
INTERVIEWER: Did you notice when it was happening?
RESPONDENT: I don't think I did notice. My momma said, "You went and acted different ever since you went to that school." That over here, that I ain't learning nothing.
INTERVIEWER: Have you noticed anything else different between the two schools?
RESPONDENT: Mostly that's it. I just don't like it because my people (family), when they look at you . . . like "Nah, she's bad," and I just don't like it. . . I mean for real! When you see people, you want to change and stuff like that 'cause it's a lot of drug addicts up here, and I be like, I don't see how they can do it over and over again '*cause I'm not that kind of person."*
INTERVIEWER: You're leaving next week; what does that mean to you?
RESPONDENT: That I guess I did my time, and I will never do it again. . . Like if you did the crime, you gonna do the time.

This series of school stories told by Tanya demonstrate how the collectives' general perceptions of Recovery Place as a social context (Van Acker & Wehby, 2000) are revealed in both their characterizations of themselves (in this setting) and in their characterizations of other students. In these excerpts, Tanya's claim that "I'm not that kind of person," is bolstered by her family's perceptions, and broadening (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990) reveals that this context allows her to characterize herself (in contrast to others) as a capable, drug-free student who cares about her education and future academics despite her current circumstance.

Despite her negative perceptions, Tanya ends her school story with a narrative of transformation and hope revealing her resilient character. While she accepts that she has committed a "crime," she seems determined to re-story (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990) this event in the opening exchanges where she asserts that she had "just forgotten about" everything that happened that day. As we end, parallel stories allows us to see how Tanya discovers that the context of the alternative school influences students' behaviors in nega-

tive ways as they come to incorporate the plot lines (Craig, 1999) of "school of last chance" into their emerging and developing story of self. She perceives her Recovery Place experience negatively, outside of her perception of who she is. Ultimately, she re-stories her actions to friends, family, and eventually herself.

Transformations.

INTERVIEWER: Why do you want to teach?
RESPONDENT: Why do I want to [teach math even though] I don't know how to learn it? To me, what I want to do, I do. If I take my time, I will. That's how I feel, 'cause like I'll be good at it . . . if I try my best. I just like teaching kids, helping somebody.

Tanya's narrative shows how the participants perceive their families as conveyers of values and places of security and hope. These positive perceptions perhaps mediate the academic and social risks that they continue to face. For instance, Tanya's early life in a small town with close family ties seems to provide a foundation upon which her current plans for success are constructed, or as Freiberg, Connell, and Lorentz (2001) maintain provides, "a tapestry of parental and community involvement" that enables a greater connectedness necessary for success (p. 254). Her narrative is representative of the participants' use of earlier positive experiences (outside the context of the school) as a background against which transformations are situated.

Denise

Denise sat for her first interview four days after her fifteenth birthday, so it was no surprise that this event was fresh in her mind.

Family stories.

RESPONDENT: Any events? . . . My fifteenth birthday. 'Cause I was supposed to have a *Quinceañera* and it didn't happen because I made mistakes. And . . . because my dad, he went to jail.

Denise's narrative starts as a story of both personal mistakes and family challenges that contribute to her high-risk status. Her narrative provides an example of the role that family risks play in the dynamic risk/resiliency interaction revealed by the collective. She does not directly talk about the emotional impact of her stepfather's incarceration but her tone, the aspects of the stories that she chooses to tell, and her choice of terminology allow for the reconstruction of the impact these events have. Denise begins with the "family

story" of a significant cultural/familial/personal event that did not occur because she "made mistakes" and because her stepfather was not there because he also "made mistakes." Her insight, facilitated by the process of inquiry, provides a context for her school story.

Denise's school story also allows us to glimpse the violence that surfaces in the narratives of the collective. In eighth grade, she received fifteen (15) disciplinary violations including fighting and *simple assault*. In assessing why these problems occurred, school stories and stories of peers overlap, each providing a context for the other.

Peer stories.

RESPONDENT: I was always with the Mexicans and the Chicanos. *But, the group of Chicanos that I used to talk to, some of them turned against me. . .* So everybody that I used to hang out with, they don't like me. . . . The Mexicans . . . they just all, like, dress Mexican, and they talk their Spanish and they're just like, supposedly they're poor. . . the Chicanos dress with their pants creased and their [designer] shoes. They have a fade (haircut), and the girls are *all* pretty with makeup and everything.

Denise speaks of the Chicanos with a tone of contempt, as though she does not agree with the way they, the girls in particular, display their perceived status. She confirms that their perceived separation is trivial and concludes, "There's no difference, it's just probably the way they dress and the way they act, they all have Mexican inside them, so there's no difference." In the end, this distancing from her peers allows her to re-story the fight and violence as meaningless as well. The process of broadening (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990) allows us to glimpse Denise's character in this story originally told as a longer monologue explaining her change in status with peers. As she retells the story of the fight and describes the characters in her school stories, Denise examines her "friends'" behavior within the larger contexts of racial discord, female/female interactions, and peer group loyalty. Hers is indicative of the narratives the collective tells with regard to these issues. From this exchange, we are able to see the importance of status in peer groups, the competition that surfaces among adolescent females, and conflict that occurs both between and within ethnic groups. Denise provides an example of how these participants take an active role in mediating their risks (Rutter, 1990) through the process of narrating their stories and widens the factors that motivate the behavior of their peers *and their behavior with those peers.* This active examination of risks using a reflective cognitive style, according to Masten, Morrison, Pellegrini, and Telle-

gen (1990), could be predictive of a resilient character.

Angela

The first impression upon meeting Angela, a sixteen-year-old ninth grader and mother of a five-month-old daughter, was that she appeared sad or embarrassed. Angela's story of family is perhaps the backdrop against which she writes all of her other narratives.

Transformations.

RESPONDENT: The important thing was 'cause I hurt my mom a lot, and what I did, it was wrong. . . .I ran away from the house. . . . When I was with that guy, I did a lot of things that I didn't supposed to be doing. *And I think I hurt my mom more than myself.*
RESPONDENT: We were fighting a lot. One time, I just left his house, and some girls told him that I was drinking and all that stuff, which I don't do that. So he thought for himself . . . just went in the house, and just pulled my hair and he started hitting (me). . . *And he thought it was easy for him, not to even notice what I was saying. He wouldn't even let me talk. . .* I wanted to leave his house and go talk to my mom, but I never had a ride to go to my mom's.

Isolated from family, Angela only leaves when he sends her away.

RESPONDENT: He [said], "I don't want to see you no more." So I go, "All right then, I'm just going to go with my mom then and give (tell) her my feelings a lot."

With this act of "giving" her feelings to her mother, a new phase of her life begins. The birth of her daughter is a turning point, and despite events that continued to place her at-risk, Angela's re-storying of herself as a responsible mother is clear. Her family story, similar to the stories of the others, seems to mediate her perception of the unplanned pregnancy allowing her resiliency to manifest.

Family stories.

RESPONDENT: I didn't hardly sleep. I was thinking about what I was going to do when the baby was [here]. It was hard for me to have her. [I was wondering] if it was going to be hard for me to take care of her, and what I was going to tell her when she was grown up.

In the end, Angela concludes:

RESPONDENT: My baby. She's the most important stuff to me. . . 'cause she's gonna make me never think wrong, do wrong stuff. She's gonna make me stay away from bad people. . . . I don't want to do that no more 'cause now . . . I have my baby. . . . *Every time that I've tried to do something, I think about her first.*

Throughout the interviews, Angela struggles to re-story her personal narrative. The fusion of intimacy and identity (Gilligan, 1982) manifests as Angela, like Denise and Tanya, comes to see herself as she appears in various settings. As she tells her accounts, like the others, she is never far from the thought of her family and her obligations to them. For her, the story of *being* "bad" seems to be simultaneously a story of *becoming* "good." These excerpts highlight the interconnected nature of the participants' narratives. In them, we see periods that define risks (i.e. early pregnancy) are interwoven through the process of re-storying with periods that are examples of a resilient nature. Angela's evolving context of family impacts her perceptions of what is important, and in her re-storying, her insights allow her to position these negative events into an overall narrative of hope.

Grace

During the interview, Grace was perhaps the most articulate and outspoken of the participants. She begins her narrative insightfully where she feels "the problems" really started.

Peer stories.

RESPONDENT: Like two years ago, you know, you start liking boys . . . and you start having boyfriends. I think that was part of the problem 'cause in the eighth grade, I had this boyfriend, and he was a bad influence [on] me 'cause I started not doing my work. Then I started getting behind. By then, all the teachers knew . . . we were going out. *So that was part of the problems.*

Grace's peer stories provide an example of the dual nature of all of the narratives with respect to drug use among female adolescents.

RESPONDENT: I think me and my friend just wanted to try it. So after school . . . we took 'em (pills). . . Two days later, they called me into the office, and they searched me. They said that somebody said that I had drugs, but they didn't find nothing on me. So they called my mom, and they told her. . . *She was, like, surprised. She was, like, I guess you could say, she was sad and disappointed.* She was kind of mad. Then, um,

I told her *I would never do it again, and she believed me. . . But then, I did it again this year.*
INTERVIEWER: What made you go back to the drugs?
RESPONDENT: I don't know. I guess I liked it. Whenever I did smoke, I was just, like relaxed. You know, I would do nothing bad while I was high, I would just chill right there in my house. And I remember when I got caught, it was my birthday. . . I had a bar (pill) on me, but [my friend] didn't know because otherwise she wouldn't have let me took it. *[My friend] was gonna say not to do it because I guess she cares about me because she really don't want me doing that, so I didn't tell her.* So then, I took that [pill]. They called me [to the office] . . . and they noticed at the office that something was wrong with me. I was denying it.

Several things must be highlighted to gain some perspective on Grace's risky behavior and her potential for resiliency as well. First, a brief admission that she likes the drugs to help her relax gives some small insight into the possibility that drugs are a means of escaping problems, clearly risky behavior. However, although she has peers who use drugs, she also has peers who "care" enough to warn her of the dangers of her behavior. Finally, school personnel take a special interest in Grace, who is an athlete. The office personnel and her supportive parents seemed to recognize what was still apparent at the time of the interview, that the drugs (and Grace's behavior with the drugs) seemed out of character. From these exchanges, it looks as if narratives of family, peers, and school provide the contours of Grace's story. This final excerpt demonstrates the relationship of these contexts and provides an example of how this interaction allows the transformation stories of the collective to emerge.

Family stories.

RESPONDENT: [My mother] looked mad. And then I regretted it from the beginning, but then. . . I should have thought about it . . . I was feeling kind of sad, but then my dad saw me and said not to cry, that it was gonna be okay. . . then later, he was crying, and I couldn't believe he was crying, because it takes a lot for him to cry. And he was saying that I broke his heart, and he don't want me doing that . . . *And I'm not going to do it anymore 'cause I realized that I hurt him a lot.*

Later, she expands on this theme of family and the importance of their support in her efforts to transform, a theme prevalent in all of the narratives.

RESPONDENT: [If] a parent gets mad at you, right? And they gonna get mad . . . but then they put you down; it doesn't make you want to be better. But if they were telling you that they *care* about you, and they want you to stop, then it's gonna make me want to stop. That's me . . . they're going to tell me what to do, and I'm going to think about it.

Broadening (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990) allows us to view Graces statement of "that's me" as "I am the person who wants to be cared for, and I am the person who reciprocates caring feelings by doing the right thing." In this characterization of herself, Grace confirms that for her to bounce back, she will need "caring" people in her life. Caring as an act in Grace's narratives seems to determine how engaged and connected she will be to family, peers, and school. Without it, this former honor roll student may continue her risky behavior. It seems that "caring" is also the backdrop against which mosaics of hope are affixed.

Nancy

Early in our interviews, Nancy chose to talk about the second grade when she "learned a lot; had a nice teacher; and everybody got along." Her narrative provides evidence that despite various environmental risks, each of the participants has positive early school experiences. However, the next grade she recalls is fifth, and it is rated only as "pretty okay." She did not remember the teachers, and by then had begun to fail. Nancy assesses, like several of the participants that her school failure began with an interest in boys.

School stories.

RESPONDENT: I didn't really care for work. *I didn't get it.* I had a boyfriend, so I wasn't into work. I wouldn't do my work; I would talk a lot. I didn't care. I was failing. *I thought it was going to get better, but it really didn't.*

Nancy's assertion of "I didn't care" repeated throughout this exchange seems more a current state of mind than a memory. Academic struggles (risks) became discipline struggles (bigger risks) and her record confirms that despite numerous consequences, including suspension, she continued to amass write-ups for tardiness, truancy, and a *weapons violation*. These continued until her mother sent her to live with relatives. In the new school, Nancy appears to want to put forth the effort, but she is devoid of hope until meeting a classmate who she describes as "different," and stories of peers and school stories collide to positively impact the teller's character.

Peer stories.

INTERVIEWER: How was she different?
RESPONDENT: "She was friendly."

This simple demonstration of kindness is met with warmth even in the retelling of a story that suggests that significant brief encounters can provide models for success in the narratives of high-risk females.

Transformations.

RESPONDENT: She was the first person I talked to. She asked me where I was from, how did I like my other school, and how did I like it at her school . . . She helped me with my work since we were in the same class. I was doing my work, and I was passing. . . *I felt better. I was passing, and I had a friend who helped me, so I just started doing my work again. . .* We would always talk a lot, and we would talk about the same stuff . . . She would talk about her problems, and we would just talk back and forth.
INTERVIEWER: Did you have similar problems?
RESPONDENT: Well, yeah. 'Cause she was skipping school too, and then she decided not to. . . I remember her telling me that, before, she was always getting into trouble for skipping and not doing her work, fighting. *She would tell me that she wanted to change, so she changed.*
INTERVIEWER: What did she do to change?
RESPONDENT: She was going to another school, and there were kids there that didn't like her, so she switched and [then she] changed.

Burrowing (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990) allows us to see how Nancy's description of her friend highlights those characteristics that she is not able to display (i.e. a spirit of independence and the courage and determination to change). Nancy tells of her new friend's transformation as though it could be attributed to the simple act of changing schools or of *wanting to change*. In fact, for a short time, Nancy is able to experience a similar transformation, with the help of her role model. However, when the new friend moves, her support is gone; she "just stopped doing stuff" and the transformation is halted.

Nancy's first memories of school are positive, but aside from the time recounted here, she does not seem to recover from the point where she stopped "caring" for school. Her narrative shows a dependency on others for her transformation. Broadening (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990) shows that she admires her friend's independence, her determination,

and her successful transformation. Nancy re-stories her life within this context, and in doing so, demonstrates at least the potential for creating a mosaic of hope.

SUMMARY OF RESEARCH RESULTS IN THE COLLECTIVE NARRATIVE

Research Question #1

Are the events that placed an individual at risk for school failure as well as posed a potential risk for involvement with the law mediated by perceptions of academic and social contexts? Among these individual participants, it appears as though there is enough evidence to say: "Yes."

Contextualizing risks. In these narratives, it appears that the stressors that would routinely place an individual "at-risk" are viewed within the context of the participants' perceptions of past positive school experiences and success, perceptions of positive teacher/student relationships as evidenced by teachers' caring attitudes, positive peer and family relationships, and perceptions of opportunities for future success or hope. This act of contextualizing appears to allow the participants to re-story their risks as lessons that present opportunities for change and hope.

Resiliency stories. While the narratives of our participants give insight into their risks and their perceptions of those risks, other plotlines to speak to their capacity to cope in ways that mediate their perceptions in a positive direction. Likewise, while these excerpts reveal poor relationships, each of the participants recounts positive family relationships, rituals, and instances of continued parental involvement and support. They identify positive peer interactions that allow them to model competent characteristics, speaking of current and/or past relationships with teachers and other positive adults that bolster their coping efforts and allow them to maintain an overall positive view of school, despite their academic failures and despite being sent to the alternative school. Finally, each of the narratives presents an aspect of hope for a better future, and in this, we are able to see the dual nature of risk and resiliency. These stories occur in the same context, sharing plotlines and characters, and in the narrative accounting, risks are re-storied as hope.

Research Question #2

What role (if any) do perceptions and the narrative accounting of negative life events (risks) and positive coping strategies (e.g., resiliency and hope) play in mediating risks and enhancing resiliency characteristics of female students in an alternative school setting? This question grew out of the awareness that not all aspects of resiliency could be measured using simple survey methods of data collection in

high-risk groups who may not meet the "success *after* failure" definition of resiliency. To answer this question, one not only must determine the extent to which an individual's social, familial, emotional, and environmental contexts shape her potential for developing resilient characteristics, but it must also be ascertained what role that individual's perceptions play in fostering this. Tappan and Brown (1991) explain, "Whenever it is necessary to report the way it really happened the natural impulse is to compose a narrative, to tell a story that recounts the actions and events of interest in some kind of sequence . . . thereby giving them particular meaning," (p. 174). Other researchers (Werner, 1998; Sanders, 2000; Washington, 2002) stress the importance of determining the presence of an individual's "voice" when seeking to understand the role experiences (positive and negative) play in forming their mosaic (Washington, 2002). This research affirms these findings. In high-risk groups, such as our research sample of adolescent females enrolled in a disciplinary alternative school, *perceptions of contexts* (i.e. the act of contextualizing) play a critical role in how events are storied and narrative inquiry is an effective research methodology for highlighting these perceptions. With its emphasis on *contextualizing*, narrative inquiry is useful in determining the role these perceptions play in mediating the individual's ability to develop a resilient and hopeful aspect. Risks are often simple to assess, they are quantifiable—measured here in terms of socioeconomic status, number of years retained, number of fights or discipline referrals, etc. However, an individual's perception of these events is less easily measured. Through narrative inquiry, all participants have a voice. In this investigation, the participant's voice makes apparent the struggle within the contexts of these risks to reaffirm her life story and modify its living (Clandinin, 1994).

Appendix D looks at several "Prevention Events" that surfaced during this investigation. These events seemed to be either associated with risks or associated with one another, creating a system of risks and negative outcomes that can not be disentangled, which renders intervention difficult. However, a focus on prevention addresses risks early so that the manifestation or progression of negative outcomes, that themselves become risk factors for more detrimental behavior, is interrupted. The "Prevention Strategies" in this table consider that: 1) female adolescents face risks that are unique to their gender, and require unique interventions; 2) because the concepts of risk and resiliency may act as dualities occurring in the same context, prevention strategies must account for both; and 3) like resiliency, *prevention is an ongoing multifaceted process*; therefore, we must look to individuals who narrate their own stories of success as the starting place for prevention efforts.

Making Mosaics: Risk and Resiliency as Dualities

At the conclusion of the pilot study, it was proposed that juvenile females who are at "high-risk" for academic failure and involvement with the law may be able to define their own conditions of risk and resiliency (Washington, 2002). It is further concluded (and the research literature concurs) that both concepts are a part of an interconnected system that includes the personal, familial, educational, and environmental contexts acting in concert with one another. The artistic metaphor of "Making Mosaics" (Washington, 2002) was incorporated into the discussion of the pilot study to demonstrate how through the participant's stories prevalent themes, metaphors, and definitions of risk and resiliency emerged. Mosaic, as an art form, is an attempt to bring order to broken bits of glass and like the process of inquiry, the nature and quality of the final construction depends on the scope of materials available to the individual. The mosaic metaphor provides a way to discuss the findings of this expanded study and reveal how participants in the research collective are able to contextualize their negative experiences and develop resiliency and perceptions of hope where none would be predicted.

DISCUSSION

Tesserae

Mosaic tiles can be made of any material. For the most part, the tesserae are irregular fragments made from discarded broken items; however, the mosaic artist sees these fragments as the life of her subject. In the "family stories," experiences such as separation from parents are re-storied positively as times when they were "spoiled by their grandparents," or times when they were surrounded by family who talked to them and gave sound advice. Circumstances such as poverty were given little attention in the collective narrative. Likewise, instead of examining potential risks out of context, these participants *contextualized* their experiences by viewing the materials for their life stories through the eyes of other characters with whom they came in contact. During transitions such as changing schools or getting a first boyfriend, the participants rely on other characters who offer alternate plotlines or ways of handling stress. In the end, they combine their perspectives, and the tesserae (representing risks) are re-storied based on perceptions of the overall context in which they occur.

Opus

Not only is the array of available stories for the individual's mosaic refined by other characters, these fragments are chiseled by the contexts where these plotlines intersect. Opus refers to the method of placement of mosaic tiles, and metaphorically refers to how the participants choose their tesserae and how these stories are impacted by the settings in which they occur. Based on the semi-structured interview, the collective presented narratives that began with stories of the past. However, past the initial inquiry, each participant took a different detour. Those who start with lessons learned seemed to have the most insight and seemed to use the inquiry process as an opportunity to order their lives and ready themselves for a new phase. Their stories of transformation were straightforward, direct declarations were made, and stories of hope were based on their sense of control and the belief that they had both internal and external resources to accomplish their aims.

Subject

The subject of a mosaic is dependent on the choice of materials available to the individual and the manner in which she is able to affix these tiles to a backdrop. Likewise, the ability to contextualize risks allows individuals to determine what plotlines are available to them and use different aspects of those narratives to form their own story of hope. The subjects of most mosaics are difficult to comprehend at a close range; it is only when the observer steps back that the entirety of the picture emerges. Reflecting on both the narratives of the research group and on the research experience allows an overall subject of resiliency to emerge where perhaps none would be predicted. Examining the choice of stories these individuals tell, seems to provide evidence that their risks and their positive coping skills (resiliency) are intertwined. In the process of reflection (re-telling their experiences), the participants are able to revisit plotlines where they are placed at-risk. Sharing narratives that involve their first experiences with school troubles, acts of defiance, attempts to separate from parents, involvement with negative peer relationships, and use of drugs can become opportunities to recall positive lessons learned.

IMPLICATIONS FOR HIGH-RISK FEMALE ADOLESCENTS

Have you ever heard of Queen of Darkness, Queen of Light? The Queen of Darkness, it's like bad. I wouldn't say bad, like serious. Like that real hard seriousness that everybody [has]. . . Then the Queen of Light would be like happy-go-lucky, playful, goofy, all that stuff. (Washington, 2002)

High-risk individuals face serious concerns that cannot be ignored if we are to have an honest dialogue about helping them access their resilient character. "Gender-specific programs for girls employ comprehensive and integrated

methods that address and support the psychological developmental process of female adolescents while fostering connections within relationships in the context of a safe and nurturing environment" (Federal Register, 2000, p. 58894). This research has implications for schools, parents, and female adolescents.

As a group, the early adolescent years signaled a period where developmental transitions coupled with other challenges such as changing schools, or parental incarceration collided with harder academics to create stressful times. Henderson, Bernard, and Sharp-Light (1999) outline six steps to fostering resiliency. These along with the findings of this study provide a framework for gender-specific programs. First, schools should increase bonding. This is based on the assumption that children with positive social bonds are less likely to succumb to risk factors. If during transitions, such as entering the middle school grades, programs that facilitate *positive* bonding experiences were established, students would feel supported in their coping efforts. Adults and schools should set clear and consistent boundaries that involve clarifying expected behavior. At times when boundaries and rules seem to be rejected by adolescents, the provision of *healthy* boundaries induces a sense of safety and the perception that authority figures "care."

In teaching life skills, schools should be structured to facilitate cooperation, healthy conflict resolution, resistance and assertiveness skills, and healthy stress management. Teaching life skills prior to critical transitions can help *before* problems become insurmountable and negative outcomes manifest. Henderson, Bernard, and Sharp-Light (1999) note that providing care and support are the most important elements in building resiliency. Within the research group, this emerged as a critical element as well. Freiberg, Connell, and Lorentz (2001) state, "Authentic caring requires listening, reflecting, trusting, and respecting the learner," (p. 252). In this group, early school experiences involving these elements have lasting effects on participants' coping capacities. Next, schools should set high and realistic expectations. When students are labeled, these labels are often associated with low expectations that the individual adopts as a plotline for her life. If alternative schools are to be successful, they must become adept at communicating high educational and social expectations.

Finally, schools must provide opportunities for meaningful participation. This suggests allowing students to engage in decision-making, goal setting, and curriculum planning. Implementing formal school programs, at critical transitions such as their stay in alternative school programs, could prove invaluable in capitalizing on the existing strengths of this group. For individuals who are powerless in other areas of their lives, presenting choices that are healthy and safe and providing the support and skills needed to exercise those choices may be one key to enhancing resiliency.

Programs such as Recovery Place can capitalize on the belief that there is hope after failure by supporting students' efforts to cope and "rehabilitate" themselves. With respect to improving social skills and academics of students at the alternative school, it appears that information gained from the research collective can be used to shape that story, perhaps in turn shaping students' future academic and social stories as well. Parents must likewise increase their awareness of the pivotal role that they continue to play, even as their daughters appear to push them away. It seems that mothers, in particular, must come to understand that their "mistakes" are less important to their daughters than the opportunity to develop trust through the sharing of a mutual experience. Finally, high-risk female adolescents must see elements of hope in the collective experiences of their peers. Although negative peer relations are at the heart of much juvenile delinquency, the role of positive peers in the lives of high-risk female adolescents must be examined more closely to find unexplored avenues for building success.

CONCLUSIONS

The school stories of the five participants cannot be told by their discipline files. These stories do not occur in isolation. They must be contextualized, and consideration must be given to the impact of the participants' family stories, peer stories, and transformations if programs are going to progress to a focus on prevention. It appears that as they gather materials from both positive and negative life transitions, from their own stories and the stories of others, these individuals continue to compose the subject of who they are. "People live storied lives, and in the telling of them reaffirm them, modify them, and create new ones," (Clandinin & Connelly, 1994, p. 415). "Queen of Darkness" (Washington, 2002) may describe how a story of isolation and abandonment starts, but the conclusion, "Queen of Light," is foreshadowed by elements of hope and resiliency that are articulated throughout the participants' narratives.

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Appendix A

Enrollment of Male and Female Students by School Year

School Year	Male Enrollment	Female Enrollment
1995-1996	154	21
1996-1997	271	42
1997-1998	196	24
1998-1999	225	31
1999-2000	236	43
2000-2001	254	62
2001-2002	320	78
2002-2003	322	102

Appendix B

Participants at a Glance

(Pseudonym)	Age	Ethnicity	Reason for expulsion
Tanya	14	African American	Under the influence[b]
Denise	15	Hispanic	Under the influence[b]
Angela	16	Hispanic	Under the influence[b]
Grace	16	Hispanic	Under the influence[b]
Nancy[a]	16	Hispanic	Under the influence[b]

[a] Notes. Participant #5 is enrolled at one of the district's five high schools (i.e. she is not a first time ninth grader).
b In violation of a rule in the student code of conduct which states: sells, gives, delivers, possesses, uses, or under the influence of marijuana or other controlled substances.

Appendix C

Cross-case Comparison of Discipline Referrals

Participant	Grade Levels	Number of Discipline Referrals
Tanya	6th	0
	7th	3
	8th	3
	9th	1
	Recovery Place	3
	Since returning to regular school	0
		Total-10
Denise	6th	Record not available [b]
	7th	5
	8th	15
	9th	3
	Recovery Place	1
	Since returning to regular school	1
		Total-25
Angela	6th	Record not available [b]
	7th	21
	8th	0
	9th	1
	Recovery Place	0
	Since returning to regular school	5
		Total-27
Grace	6th	0
	7th	0
	8th	0
	9th	1
	Recovery Place	1
	Since returning to regular school	4
		Total-6
Nancy	6th	Record not available [b]
	7th	6
	8th	6
	9th	1
	9th (high school)[a]	5
	Recovery Place	2
	Since returning to regular school	8
		Total-28

Notes. [a] Nancy was enrolled in high school at the time of the research. Other members of the collective were enrolled in the district's ninth grade centers. [b] School records not available (student may have been enrolled in a different school district).

Appendix D

Summary Chart of Prevention Strategies

Grade	Prevention Event	Prevention Strategies
4th	Academic difficulties	School failure was associated both with a more rigorous curriculum and with changes in the individual's life outside of school. Prevention efforts must address both. • Examine school failure at this time within context of past school performance. If there is not a previous pattern of failure, schools must explore possible changes in the students' personal contexts that could explain changes in academic ability. • Identify academic strengths and help females begin to explore career goals. • Provide supports to ESL (English as a second language) students who may face greater challenges with the language as the curriculum becomes more difficult.
5th	Fights with peers	Fights with peers were related to feelings of isolation and absence of positive peer and adult support. Prevention efforts should be aimed at identifying signs of poor self-esteem and poor relationship building skills. • Acknowledge changes in school structure that begins in the intermediate schools, and help students plan for this significant transition. Intermediate teachers must receive staff development on developmental issues that pertain to female adolescents and look for these changes in preadolescent girls. • Implement strategies that help students adjust to changes in the social environment of the intermediate schools by helping teens develop empathy skills and creating opportunities for cooperation with other girls. • Identify those students who are new to the school and connect them with positive peer supports to alleviate the feelings of being the "new girl."
6th	Defiance of authority; Early exploration of sexual relationships	Defiance of authority began with the need to separate from parental figures and even separate from some aspects of culture and family rules. As the participants gained more freedom and widened their circle of friends, their parents' influence became less important. This coupled with unresolved anger or feelings of abandonment and loss seems to lead female adolescents to reject parental authority and also seems connected to the propensity to move closer to intimate relationships with adolescent males. • Parents and the school should address the need to explore sexuality in a healthy manner and the need for positive role models in order to develop a high self concept. • School counselors and social workers should identify those girls who have no consistent female role model (e.g. girls in foster care or in the care of grandparents, girls who are separated from mothers through abandonment, death, incarceration, etc.) and establish mentoring type relationships with these individuals as well as provide opportunities for these individuals to tell their stories collectively through counseling groups. • Teaching assertiveness skills is essential for helping females relate emotional needs to parents, reject pressures to engage in early sexual activity, and solve disputes with others. • Provide activities that allow males and females to have age appropriate interaction.

Appendix D, Continued

Summary Chart of Prevention Strategies

Grade	Prevention Event	Prevention Strategies
7th	Early access to drugs; Running away from home	Drug use and running away from home was related to ineffective stress management and poor emotions management. Schools and parents must join together in order to identify behaviors that may lead to drug use among adolescent girls. • Parents (especially working parents) must look for signs of diminished coping (irritability, frequent fights with family members, or evidence that belief systems are changing) and communicate directly with adolescents. • Trust must be established and maintained by setting consistent and reasonable boundaries. • Parents should actively monitor teens and their friends and have routine, honest communication about their expectations regarding drug use. • If both parents are present, they must work together and communicate expectations. Single parents must communicate honestly and find age appropriate ways to relate their stories (especially stories of lessons learned) to their daughters. • Mothers should identify strengths in their daughters in order to help them form healthy self concepts. Likewise, schools must create programs that capitalize on strengths and competencies rather than deficits and poor behaviors. • Drug prevention programs in these grades must focus on issues of avoidance and forming healthy coping skills to replace negative coping mechanisms. • School counselors and social workers can identify adolescent females who display "run away" behaviors such as truancy or withdrawal from routine activities.
8th	School disengagement	In this study, the students with the least number of discipline referrals seemed to also be more engaged in school activities. • Schools must actively identify girls who demonstrate lack of engagement through their academics and behavior to participate in school activities and also identify community activities available to families. • Schools must gather data on school completion rates of female adolescents' family members, especially older siblings. • Identifying cultural values, community norms, as well as pressures from families to leave school is an important element in preventing dropouts which often occur once students enter high school. • Extracurricular activity sponsors must be careful to provide opportunities for all members to be successful and participate. • Teachers and counselors must demonstrate "caring" especially at key transitions during the middle years. Creating caring climates involves communicating high expectations, allowing for "mistakes," avoiding labeling, listening to students' concerns, and providing females an opportunity to express themselves in safe, non-threatening environments. • Female adolescents must establish goals and communicate these goals with parents, peers, and school personnel who can assist them with locating academic and community supports.

Appendix D, Continued

Summary Chart of Prevention Strategies

Grade	Prevention Event	Prevention Strategies
9th	Involvement with juvenile justice system	All of the participants in this investigation had committed an offense that could have potentially involved them in the juvenile justice system, being under the influence of an illegal substance. Recognizing that the risks for school failure are often the same risks that precede involvement with the criminal justice system is essential to preventing future incarceration of minority females. • Parents must not minimize the potential risk posed by involvement in delinquent behaviors such as truancy, running away, and drug use. They must acknowledge that for females, adolescence is a time of increased risks. Therefore, they must seek help from community resources early before negative outcomes (pregnancy, academic failure, emotional disturbance) manifest. • Schools should also treat early delinquent behaviors (which may manifest as early as late elementary or the intermediate years) with a sense of urgency. Poor and minority females who also evidence poor academics, poor social skills, and poor behaviors with adults must be targeted for more intensive interventions that consider personal, familial, community, and peer contexts. • Female adolescents who have experienced negative outcomes associated with risks must recognize their own potential for change. They must begin by acknowledging negative coping skills and poor choices and work to identify strengths and positive adult and peer relationships and use those relationships as systems of support upon which new hope is built.

Appendix E

Cross-case Summary of Narrative Plotlines

	Tanya	Denise	Angela	Grace	Nancy
Positive Peers	X	X	X	X	X
Insightful	X	X	X	X	X
Family Support & Connection to Family	X	X	X	X	X
Parental Support	X			X	
Positive Early School Experiences	X	X	X	X	X
Positive Experience at Recovery Place		X	X	X	X
Recognized Need for Change		X	X		X
School Participation	X			X	
Positive Outlook/Hope	X	X	X	X	X
Other	X	X	X	X	
Family Cohesion & Support (Richman & Fraser, 2001; Rak & Patterson, 1996)	X	X	X	X	X
Some Measure of School Success (Juvenile Female Offenders, 1998)	X	X		X	
Internal Locus of control (Werner & Smith, 1982)	X			X	
Family Bonds (Werner, 1998); Family Rituals (Richman & Fraser, 2001; Rak & Patterson, 1996)	X	X	X	X	
Reflective Cognitive Style (Masten et. al., 1990)			X	X	
High Self-concept (Rak & Patterson, 1996)		X		X	
Spiritual Connectedness (Maniglia, 1998)			X		
Achievement of Positive Outcomes after failure (Luther, 2000; Richman & Fraser, 2001)			X		
Other	X			X	

Appendix F

Interview Protocol
Cross-case Summary of Narrative Plotlines

Topic Domain One: Perceptions of Risk/Life Stressors

Lead Question One: Tell me about three important events in your life. If you had to rank them in order of significance, what would come first, second, third?

[Covert Categories of Interest: personal stressors, environmental stressors, academic/school stressors, turning points-lows, metaphors used to describe social environment, role of environment, peers, school in personal perception of risk]

Possible Follow-up Questions:
- Think back to your first memory of school. Describe your school "career" each year since then.
- Describe the events leading to your expulsion from school.
- Tell about the first time that you "got into trouble" in school? What is it like when you are not in trouble?
- Tell me about your neighborhood. Your family, friends.
- Tell me about a time in your life that things did not seem to be going the right way for you. What about a time when things seemed to be going really well for you.
- When things were not going right, what did you do to make them better? When things were going well, what did you do to keep them that way?
- Describe your best friend. In what ways are you all alike and different?

Topic Domain Two: School Organizational Structure

Lead Question Two: Describe your last three months of school. Compare this program to your home school.

[Covert Categories of Interests: teacher care/interest; support for academic tasks; opportunities for involvement; feelings of belongingness and security; structure of course assignments; discipline policies; opportunities for educational success; clarity of purpose of schooling; status differences among students in the classroom as well as the school; the extent to which student behaviors are criminalized; the extent to which school is seen as relevant in meeting goals]

Possible Follow-up Questions:
- How do you know which classes to go to on the first day of school?
- If you had to describe the students in this program, what would you say?
- How would a teacher describe the students in this program?
- Describe a situation where you have been able to work with other students to complete an assignment/project.
- What are some of the extracurricular activities available at your school? In what ways have you participated?
- Tell me about a typical lesson that a teacher would present to the class.
- Are there any teachers that you have had that teach in a "different" way?
- How would you describe yourself as a student in class?
- Describe a classroom situation where you have felt successful.
- If you were an administrator, how would you run the school?
- What are some of the ways that teachers describe students at your school?
- Pretend that you are walking down the halls during the class change or you have just entered the cafeteria during lunch, describe the different groups that you may see or encounter.
- How would I know who has the most power in your school?
- Tell me about the different groups of students at this school. What about your home school?
- What kinds of things do students do to get into trouble at your school? Here? What do you think of the rules at your school?
- How do kids in schools know that they have done a good job?
- Pretend that you have met another teen from a small town. Describe your home school campus for them. What about this campus?
- How were you made aware of the school rules? Classroom rules? Here?

Interview Protocol
Cross-case Summary of Narrative Plotlines

Possible Follow-up Questions (Continued):
- Pretend that you have met another teen from a small town. Describe your home school campus for them. What about this campus?
- How were you made aware of the school rules? Classroom rules? Here?
- On a scale of 1-10 where would you rank school?

Topic Domain Three: Perceptions of Competency (Resiliency)

Lead Question Three: Tell me about a recent event where you felt successful.

[Covert Categories of Interest: perceptions of self-esteem; post-secondary educational plans/expectations for success; problem-solving/decision-making abilities; ability to form positive relationships & attractiveness to peers; flexibility; self-motivation; feelings of personal competence; internal locus of control; level of school engagement; autonomy; personal faith in something greater]

Possible Follow-up Questions:
- Can you think of other times when you felt good about something that you did? In School?
- Describe your relationship with your best friend.
- What do other people say about you?
- Describe the most important person in your life? What qualities does that person have that you wish you had?
- In the next five years, I will . . .
- Describe for a recent problem that you have had. How did you go about solving it?
- Who helps you when you cannot solve a problem?
- If you were to start a club in school, what would it be?
- What does it mean when a person "hits a brick wall"?
- Think of the last major project that you have had to complete. Describe the process for me from beginning to end.
- Give me a list of things that make you feel good. What about lists of things that make you feel bad?
- If you were sent away at the last minute but could only pack one bag, what would you take?